

THE SCARLET LINE IN THE WINDOW

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“She bound the scarlet line in the window.”
Joshua 2:21

EVERY little incident in a remarkable conversion like that of the harlot Rahab is worthy of notice. The apostle James selected her as an illustration of the fact that faith is always attended by good works, and he asks, “Was she not justified by works when she had received the messengers?” while Paul quotes her as an instance of justification by faith, and says, “By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not.” If both these eminent apostles found an illustration of an important doctrine in her life, we, surely, may do the same. If the hiding of the spies under the flax had some significance, so also had the hanging out of the scarlet line.

The two spies whom Rahab had concealed made an agreement with her that she should hang out a scarlet line in the window by which she had let them down, that they might know, in the day of battle, the house in which she dwelt. She fulfilled their request and displayed the chosen emblem. In connection with that scarlet line, I observe four things.

I. First, I see here AN OBEDIENT BELIEVER.

She was told to tie the scarlet thread in the window and she did it—there was *exact obedience*. It was not merely *a* thread, *a* line, but the *scarlet line*. She did not substitute a blue, or a green, or a white line. The order was *this scarlet line*, not another, and she took that particular one. Obedience to God will be very much seen in small matters. Love always delights to attend to the little things and thereby makes the little things great.

I have heard of a Puritan who was charged with being too precise, but his answer was excellent, “I serve a precise God.” The Lord our God is a jealous God and He is very jealous of His commands. It appeared a little mistake that Moses made when he struck the rock instead of speaking to it, and yet he could not enter into the promised rest because of his offense.

A small action may involve a great principle and it is for us to be very cautious and careful, searching out what the Master’s will is, and then never halting or hesitating for any reason whatever, but doing His will as soon as ever we know it. Christian life should be a mosaic of minute obediences. The soldiers of Christ should be famous for their exact discipline.

I commend scrupulous obedience to all of you and especially to those young people who have lately made a profession of their faith in Christ. Do not be as your fathers were, for the generation which is now going off the stage neither reads its Bible nor cares to know the Lord’s will. If people searched the Scriptures, we would find them come together in union—but the least-read book in all the world, in proportion to its circulation, is the Word of God. It is distributed everywhere, but it is scarcely read anywhere with care and attention—and with a sincere resolve to follow its precepts at all hazards.

You come and listen to us and we give you little bits taken from it here and there, but you do not get a fair notion of it as a whole. How can you? Ministers make mistakes and you follow them without inquiry. One elects this leader, and another that, to the creation of varieties of opinions and even of sects, which ought not to be, and would not be if all stood fast by the standard of inspired truth.

If the Bible were but read, and prayed over, many errors would die a speedy death and others would be sorely crippled. Had that inspired Book been read in the past, many errors would never have arisen.

Search ye, then, the Book of God, I pray you—and whatever you find there, be sure to attend thereto. At all costs, keep to the Word of God.

Notice, next, that hers was *obedience in a very small matter*. She might have said, “I do not think it is essential to tie a piece of line in my window. Can I not be preserved just as well without it, seeing that I believe in the God of Israel? I have faith and I have shown it by my works by hiding the spies—you cannot suppose for a moment that I shall perish simply because I have not complied with a regulation about a scarlet line.”

In this way many, nowadays, inquire whether they may not omit those duties which they consider to be non-essential to salvation. Now this is a question which I never intend to answer for anybody else, because I never intend to ask it on my own account. Whether or not a believer will perish because some known duty or Scriptural ordinance is neglected, is a question which only selfishness would raise.

Are we only to do that which will procure our progress or secure our salvation? Are we so grossly selfish as that? Does a loving child say, “If I refuse to do my father’s will, shall I not still be my father’s child? Shall I not still be fed and clothed by him?” Only an evil child would talk thus. The true son inquires, “What would my father have me do? I will do it cheerfully for his sake. What does my father forbid? For what he forbids shall be hateful to me.” Rise above all questions concerning essential and non-essential, and learn to obey in all things—if it be only tying a scarlet thread in the window, or washing in water, do as you are bidden—and in nothing rebel against the Word of the Lord.

Remember, too, that this small matter of obedience, as some call it, had *an important symbolical signification*. I am not sure that the spies meant by it that the scarlet thread should be the same to Rahab as the blood on the lintel and on the two side posts had been to Israel in Egypt, but it does strike me as being very probable.

Those two men were so acquainted with the Passover, and the sprinkling of the blood, and the consequent preservation of all in this house, that it was very natural that they should give Rahab a sign akin to the token which God had ordained for His people Israel when His angel passed them by in the day of doom.

Therefore, trifling as the color of the cord might seem, it had a deep significance—and even so commands of God, which are little in themselves—are great in symbolic teaching. Great errors have come into the Christian church by the alteration of simple points in God’s commands, and therefore, since a little thing in the sign may involve a great thing in the substance, it becomes us to cultivate exact obedience.

“Oh,” says one, “but I fear we shall always be in error.” Assuredly we shall, unless we endeavor to avoid it. Unless we give abundant attention to the Word of God, we shall fall into mistakes beyond number. Errors are unavoidable if we do not study our perfect Chart, even as it is certain that a man will lose his way if he never inquires about it.

At any rate, we need not rush into mistakes by omitting to use our judgment and to inform our understanding. Ask the Lord to teach you by His Holy Spirit and you will not be taught wrongly. Commit yourself to His instruction and be willing to do what He teaches you—and you will not go amiss.

This woman’s obedience also arose out of real faith and was the exponent of that faith, for when she tied the scarlet line in the window, she expressed her confidence in the fact that Jericho would be destroyed and that she would be saved, because she had received a promise to that effect. She would not have hidden the spies if she had not believed in their God. And after having done so, if her faith had failed her, she would not have complied with the covenant requirement to hang the scarlet line in the window.

Beloved, obey in faith. The obedience of the slave is worth little. The obedience of the child is precious, for it is the fruit of love. That keeping of God’s commands which comes of slavish fear lacks the very heart and bowels of obedience, for love is absent, but as God’s dear children, resting alone in Jesus, confiding in your Father’s promise, feel that *because you believe you must obey*, not because you

dread hell or expect to win heaven through any works of your own—but because you have believed in Jesus to the salvation of your soul and therefore, it is your joy to do His bidding.

Thus I have enlarged upon the first point of the text, that, in the hanging out of the scarlet line, I discern an obedient believer.

II. Now, secondly, I see here AN APPROPRIATED COVENANT.

These men had made a covenant with her that she would have her life spared, and the lives of her family, if she concealed their secret, and if she tied a scarlet line in the window. As she tied up that line she did, as it were, say, “I claim the covenant that you have made with me.”

Beloved, let us speak about this for a moment, for we want more and more to be able to appropriate covenant blessings. How do we appropriate Jesus? *By simple faith.* Faith is the hand which touches the head of the great sacrifice, and lays sin upon it, that sin may no longer lie upon the sinner. Faith grasps Jesus as the Bread of life and makes that Bread to be our own, that we may feed upon it and may live forever. Thus the grand thing for appropriating Christ is to obtain faith and to gain more and more faith.

Do you remember when you first tied a scarlet line in your window and said, “Christ is mine”? I remember the very hour and the precise spot, but many cannot tell the moment or the occasion—nor need they agitate themselves about it if they still continue to tie that line in its place. Still, you do remember that there was such a time when you could say, “Jesus is mine.” You apprehended Christ because He had apprehended you.

If such an hour as that has never come to you, may it come even now! Jesus Christ can save you, but He must be appropriated, or He will be no Savior to you. Remember that God the Holy Ghost Himself, though He is the Author of faith, cannot believe for you—you must believe personally for yourself.

Certain persons talk very much of repentance as the gift of the Holy Spirit, and their witness would be true if they would not exaggerate it so as to leave the impression on men’s minds that the Holy Ghost repents, and that the sinner has little or nothing to do with it, for that is not true, since it is clear that the Holy Spirit has nothing to repent of—repentance is an act of the repenting sinner’s own soul, and faith a personal exercise of the heart, “for with the heart man believeth unto righteousness.”

If we do not ourselves repent and believe, Christ is not ours and we are none of His, neither shall we obtain any benefit from His life and death. Tie the scarlet line in your window, for it will not be tied there for you—you must do it with your own hands. And I do pray that, even now, you may have boldness through Christ to say, “Yes, Jesus shall be mine. I dare with humble confidence to appropriate Him for myself, since He is given freely to poor needy sinners—and I am such a sinner.”

Faith is the first and grandest way of tying the scarlet line in the window, but let your faith follow on in *the use of the ordinances and means of grace*, for these assist her in laying hold upon Jesus. I have often found it most blessed to sit at the communion table and feel, while I ate the bread and drank the wine, that faith was in active exercise, so that I said to myself “Yes, as certainly as this bread is put into my mouth and goes into my bodily system, so as to become a part of myself, so that nobody can ever take it away—even so I have by faith believed on and received into my soul the incarnate God, and in that way He has become mine, so that none can separate Him from me, or me from Him.”

The ordinance itself will not give you Christ, but often does the symbol blessedly enable the soul to realize Jesus and contemplate Him so as to partake of Him. In that draught of wine, so typical of His blood, how often has our soul said, “I rest entirely upon the Redeemer’s bloody sacrifice. His substitutionary pangs, griefs, and merits are all my trust before God, and I receive them as my sole reliance for the remission of sin, and take them into my very self, just as I drink of this cup, and thereby the juice of the vine courses through my veins.” Continue, beloved friends, thus to appropriate Jesus Christ and let every communion season be a tying of the scarlet line afresh in the window.

Let *your whole life* be a course of action correspondent to the belief that Christ is yours. I am afraid many believers live as though Jesus Christ did not belong to them at all, nor yet the blessings of the covenant. Do you think that we should be so desponding when we have losses in business if we really believed that all things are ours, and if we had tied the scarlet line in the window, and appropriated all

things as ours in Christ? Do you think we should be so soon fluttered, and made to doubt whether we are saved or not, in times of temptation, if our faith took a firm grip of Christ and tied the scarlet line in the window fast and firm by claiming the covenant of grace as ours?

Beloved, some of you have only appropriated a part of Christ. You believe you are pardoned, but you scarcely know that you are justified. You are justified and covered with His righteousness, but you have not laid hold upon the sanctification which Jesus gives you. You have a measure of grace, but you have not yet believed that Christ can sanctify you wholly—spirit, soul, and body.

We are stunted and stunted, lean and lethargic, because of our failure to grasp with holy confidence the infinite treasure which is stored up in our all-sufficient Lord. He is ours and all things are ours in Him. “According to your faith be it unto you,” is the rule of that great house over which Christ presides. This woman took the covenant which she had made with these men to be hers and showed that she did so by tying the scarlet line in the window. The covenant of grace was made with her and she knew it—and believed it, in like manner. O brother in Christ, by a living faith, grasp the promises of God and claim them as your own!

Here let me also say, *let us do this by displaying a corresponding restfulness*. After Rahab had tied the line in her window, we do not read that she did anything else, except bring her father, and her mother, and her brethren under her roof. She did not make preparations to defend the house against the siege. There is no notification that she appealed to the king to have a special guard to protect that part of the wall.

I do not believe that she had a solitary fear, or a moment’s terror—the scarlet line was in the window and she felt secure. She had appropriated the promise and she believed it would not be broken. It is a high privilege to dwell peaceably and quietly in the finished work of Christ—and in the sure immutable promise of God, who cannot lie.

Why fret yourselves and question yourselves, and go about with a thousand anxieties when salvation’s work was finished on the accursed tree, and Christ has gone into glory and has carried in His perfect work before His Father’s face? Why mourn and suspect your safety, when the Lord has raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places in Him? We who have believed enter into rest. The peace of God is ours, so let us, by our resting, show that we have tied the scarlet line in our window, have claimed the finished work of Christ, and therefore rest henceforth from our own works as God did from His.

III. Thirdly, I see here AN OPEN DECLARATION.

Rahab tied the scarlet line, not in some secret part of the house, but *in the window*. It was her public declaration of faith. I do not say that everybody understood what she meant by that—only those understood it who were in the secret with her—and that sufficed. She hung out the red signal from the window where it could be seen by those who needed to see it. It was not that she was ostentatious and wished to attract attention—but she was bound to make a public sign and she did it.

Now, some of you believe in my Lord Jesus and yet you have never united with His people. You are resting in Him, but you are mightily afraid that anybody should know it. Be not ashamed of Jesus! The wonder is that He is not ashamed of you. If He was not ashamed to take upon Him your nature and die for you, you need never blush to own His name. Come forward, you trembling ones, tie the scarlet line in your window and say, “We are His, and we confess it.”

Let it be a *scarlet line* that you tie in the window, however—namely an avowal of true faith in His precious blood, a declaration of confidence in atonement by blood—for there are some who profess a sort of faith, but it is not faith in the substitution of Christ. It is unfashionable, nowadays, to believe in the old doctrine of atonement. Modern “culture” has expunged it, or altered it in such a way that no real atonement is left.

There are many who are too advanced to avow the old-fashioned Gospel, but as for us, we tie forever the scarlet line in our window and stand by the truth once delivered to the saints. Our declaration of faith is that we believe in the real and literal substitution of Christ who died, “the just for the unjust, that he

might bring us to God.” In the midst of a thousand new gospels—none of them worth the breath that utters them—we hold to that ancient Gospel of the prophet Isaiah, “The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed.”

Beloved believer, if the doctrine of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ and His substitutionary atonement be indeed your hope, avow it. Avow it boldly and let there be no mistake about it in these evil times. Tie the scarlet line in your window, and if nobody else will see it, your brethren will mark it and be encouraged. If nobody else will be pleased with it, your God will smile upon you and you will be a sweet savor unto Him.

No man, that I know of, saw the blood upon the lintel and the two side posts, at the dead of night, in the land of Egypt, for there were none abroad to look upon it—but God saw it, and it is written, “When I see the blood, I will pass over you.” When God sees our simple confidence in His dear Son, and perceives us resting upon His Word, without the admixture of human reason and opinion, then, beloved, He will accept us in the Beloved and our house shall stand when others fall.

Every Christian ought to make his faith in the precious blood visible in many ways. It ought to be manifest in our common conversation. If we are resting in the blood of Jesus, we ought not to be able to talk a quarter of an hour without thoughtful persons perceiving that we are indeed followers of Jesus.

I have heard of a man who was so entertaining and instructive in his conversation that it was said that you could not stand under an archway for five minutes with him, to get out of the rain, without learning something from him. Every Christian ought to be of this sort in a higher style—so that you cannot be with him many minutes without perceiving him to be a man of God.

Of course in the church of Christ, the Christian man ought to hang a scarlet line out of his door at once, and let his fellow worshippers see that he is decided and resolute for the Lord, his God—but he ought to do the same in his business. Customers should soon see that in your shop the common tricks of the trade are detested. The scarlet line is over this door.

In the house, the mistress in the management of her servants, the master as a husband and as a father, should be known to be better than others. There is a certain sect of people called, “the peculiar people.” I wish we were all peculiar people in this respect, that the blood mark set us apart as not our own, but bought with a price. The Lord grant that it may be so with us!

IV. The last point is this. Here was A DEDICATED HOUSE—a house with a scarlet line in its window.

Coming here, the other afternoon, and walking down one of the back streets, I amused myself by observing how many houses were insured. I noticed the marks of the different Insurance Companies. There was *the sun* on one, with his bright face looking down upon us, as much as to say, “There shall be no loss here.” The *globe*, the *star*, the *Phoenix*—all were there as seals of safety.

Now there was only one house in Jericho that was insured—and that had for its symbol and mark of insurance a scarlet line tied in the window. What a mercy it is when houses are insured by the grace of God and dedicated to the Lord—the very houses, and much more the inhabitants of those houses. How can you dedicate a house?

I was reading, the other day, that, in Cromwell’s time, you could go down Cheapside, at a certain hour in the morning, and you would see the blinds down at every house and hear the families singing, all the way along, “for,” says an old divine, “in those days, a drawn blind was the scarlet line in the window.”

People knew, as they passed along, that there was an altar erected to God in that house. I am afraid that there are a great many streets in our towns and cities which you might traverse at any hour of the day and not discover a solitary sign of *family prayer* going on. The practice has gone out of fashion even among many who profess to be the people of God—and farewell to any progress in godliness till we bring it back again.

I believe that when the house and the church pull together, things are right. But when religion is made to be a thing of the church and not of the house—when the priest is looked to instead of the father,

when men cease to be priests in their own houses—then the very sinews of vital godliness have been cut. If I had to give up all weekday services and shut up every place of worship in Christendom from Sunday to Sunday, I would prefer to do that rather than lose the morning and evening gatherings of devout households worshipping God.

How much Scotland owes to her family devotions! You need not that I remind you of “The Cotter’s Saturday Night.” It is the very glory of that country that they do there worship God in their houses. “There is much formality about it,” cries one. Well, was there ever anything good which did not degenerate here and there? But I have witnessed, full many a time, the hearty devotion of morning and evening prayer in the North.

I wonder how many houses represented by you come up to Matthew Henry’s third standard. He says, “Those who pray, do well.” You get up to that, I hope. “Those that read the Scriptures and pray, do better. Those that read the Scriptures, and pray, and sing, do best of all.” I think so. This is the scarlet line with the threefold cord to it, and I would that every house hung out that scarlet line as meaning, “This house belongs to King Jesus. The devil need not trouble himself to come here, for the strong man armed keeps his goods in peace.”

The beauty of it was that *all inside Rahab’s house were saved*. “Come in, dear mother,” said she. Who among us could bear the thought of our mother being lost? It breaks our hearts to think of such a thing. My mother lost? Oh, no, that must not be! And your father lost? Oh, have you an unconverted father? I beseech you, give no slumber to your eyelids till you have done all you can to set before him the way of peace and have pleaded for him before God with sighs and tears.

And then she said, “Come in, dear brothers and sisters.” I delight in Rahab for loving her household. If you have brothers and sisters who are not yet under the scarlet line, pray to God to bring them in, that all your house may be dedicated to the Most High and without exception, all may dwell beneath the blessed blood-red token which infallibly preserves all who are sheltered beneath it.

I leave this point to notice that there are other things besides family prayer which should be like the scarlet line in the house. For instance, there should be, in every Christian house, a scarlet line put up in *the selecting of the company that is kept*. The Christian should carefully *select his friends and associates*. He should say, “He that tells lies shall not tarry in my sight.” As for the drunkard, and the swearer, and those who use unchaste language, let them be what they may—they shall not visit within our doors—we will not tolerate them.

If we are masters of our household, we try to find our children friends whom we should like to be their companions in eternity. Some parents introduce their children to young men and young women who happen to be “very respectable,” as they say, but who are worldly and ungodly—and thus they do much to ruin them. It should not be so. Hang the scarlet line over the door, and if they do not love that scarlet line, religious conversation will before long make the place too hot for them. If you talk much of Jesus, the frivolous will consider that they have notice to quit.

A Christian man’s house should have a scarlet line over *its reading*. I confess to great sorrow whenever I see, in a Christian man’s house, commonly laid about for the use of the girls, that dreadful rubbishing yellow stuff which pollutes every railway bookstall—much of it downright ungodliness and the best of it abominable nonsense—the reading of which is a sheer waste of time.

When there are thousands of good and interesting books to be read, it seems a pity that Christian people should give their time to reading which cannot profit them. Let the asses have their thistles, I never grudge them. And so I will not say that worldlings should not read such books—they suit them—let them have them.

I have never murmured at a farmer when I have seen him going along with his great mash of all manner of garbage to give to his hogs—as long as he did not give me a basin of it for dinner, I was satisfied to let the swine have their food. And there are a great many romances and a vast mass of literature which it is vain to deny to ungodly people, for it is after their nature.

But as for us, let us have none of it. I should as soon expect to see the archangel Gabriel feeding out of a hog's trough, as to see one who is a joint-heir with Christ finding his pleasure in books that are half lewd and the other half absurd. Hang a scarlet line over your library door as well as everywhere else.

So let it be with *all amusements*. There are some amusements that we cannot say are absolutely bad in themselves, but they lead to evil. They go up to the edge of the precipice—and there are many who only need to get so far and they are sure to fall over. Besides, they make the Christian so like the worldling that nobody could tell which is which.

Now, tie the scarlet line up. I would do so even as to what *pictures* I would hang up in my house. I am often sad to see, especially in the houses of the poor, Roman Catholic pictures exhibited on the walls, because they happen to be rather pretty and very cheap. Popish publishers have very cleverly managed to get up pictures of the Virgin, and the lying fable of her assumption to heaven, and all sorts of legends of saints and saintesses. And being brightly colored and sold very much under cost, these vile things have been introduced into thousands of houses.

I have seen, to my horror, a picture of God the Father represented as an old man—a conception almost too hideous to mention—yet the picture is hung up in the cottages of England. Whereas the Lord has declared that we should make no image of Him, or represent Him in any way—and the attempt is blasphemous. If you have a bad picture, no matter how good a work of art it is, burn it. And if you have a bad book, no matter how much it may be worth, do not sell it for somebody else to read—tear it in pieces.

Let the Christian hang up the scarlet line and make certain that nobody shall be debauched in mind or body by anything that he tolerates in his house. I may seem to be too severe, but if my Master were to speak out of heaven, He would not rebuke that as a sin on my part—far rather He would say that we need to be much more precise and decided about evil things.

Well, you shall do what you please—you have your own liberty—but “as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD,” and the blood red line shall be in my window. My father's father, do I not remember how, when I was a child, I used to hear his prayers for my father and for me? Well do I remember my father's conversion in answer to my grandfather's prayers.

And my father, can I ever forget how he wrestled for us at the mercy seat, and God forbid it should happen that in my son's house, in years to come, there should be no altar to my God! I would sooner be without a tent for myself than without an altar for the Lord. Wherever we are, we must hang up the scarlet line. We cannot expect a blessing if we do not.

Of course I am not speaking to those who are not fathers or heads of households. If they are servants, they cannot help what is done in the house. If they are underlings who have not the power, they cannot arrange as they would. But I am speaking to those who fear the Lord and can do it. Do, beloved, dedicate your house to God from the attic to the cellar. Let there be nothing even in the cellar which you would be ashamed for Jesus Christ to see. Let there be nothing about the house but what shall be so ordered that, if your Lord should come, you could open your door and say, “Come and welcome, Master. There is nothing here that Your servant desires to conceal.”

Believe in Jesus, O you who know Him not. And you who know Him, practice what you know. And God bless you! Amen and Amen

EXPOSITION BY C. H. SPURGEON

1 CHRONICLES 21:9-20

Verses 9-11. *And the LORD spake unto Gad, David's seer, saying, Go and tell David, saying, Thus saith the LORD, I offer thee three things: choose thee one of them, that I may do it unto thee. So Gad came to David, and said unto him, Thus saith the LORD, Choose thee*

David was to choose where there was no choice, for everything proposed to him seemed to be equally bitter.

12-13. *Either three years' famine; or three months to be destroyed before thy foes, while that the sword of thine enemies overtaketh thee; or else three days the sword of the LORD, even the pestilence, in the land, and the angel of the LORD destroying throughout all the coasts of Israel. Now therefore advise thyself what word I shall bring again to him that sent me. And David said unto Gad, I am in a great strait: let me fall now into the hand of the LORD; for very great are his mercies: but let me not fall into the hand of man.*

It shows how he was broken down. David's proud heart was humbled, he was entirely submissive to the will of God, he wished to fall into the hands of the Lord.

14-15. *So the LORD sent pestilence upon Israel: and there fell of Israel seventy thousand men. And God sent an angel unto Jerusalem to destroy it: and as he was destroying, the LORD beheld,*

It is a very beautiful word—the Lord looked steadfastly on what was being done.

15. *And he repented him of the evil, and said to the angel that destroyed, It is enough, stay now thine hand. And the angel of the LORD stood by the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite.*

One of the old inhabitants of the land who had escaped destruction and had his possession on the top of Mount Moriah.

16-17. *And David lifted up his eyes, and saw the angel of the LORD stand between the earth and the heaven, having a drawn sword in his hand stretched out over Jerusalem. Then David and the elders of Israel, who were clothed in sackcloth, fell upon their faces. And David said unto God, Is it not I that commanded the people to be numbered? even I it is that have sinned and done evil indeed; but as for these sheep, what have they done? let thine hand, I pray thee, O LORD my God, be on me, and on my father's house; but not on thy people, that they should be plagued.*

Here the great heart of the man who had sinned comes out again—he is no tyrant after all—he is a worthy man to be the Viceroy of the Most High. He has the same spirit that Moses had, when he cried, “If not, blot my name out of the Book of Life.” He offers himself, not the innocent for the guilty, but indeed, the guilty for the guilty. As far as he can, he will bear the consequences of his sin.

18-20. *Then the angel of the LORD commanded Gad to say to David, that David should go up, and set up an altar unto the LORD in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite. And David went up at the saying of Gad, which he spake in the name of the LORD. And Ornan turned back, and saw the angel; and his four sons with him hid themselves. Now Ornan was threshing wheat.*

He was busy at his threshing and he saw the angel standing by his own threshing floor .

20. *And his four sons with him hid themselves.*

There are great caverns hard by the spot and no doubt, they ran into one of them.

20-23. *Now Ornan was threshing wheat. And as David came to Ornan, Ornan looked and saw David, and went out of the threshingfloor, and bowed himself to David with his face to the ground. Then David said to Ornan, Grant me the place of this threshingfloor, that I may build an altar therein unto the LORD: thou shalt grant it me for the full price: that the plague may be stayed from the people. And Ornan said unto David, Take it to thee, and let my lord the king do that which is good in his eyes: lo, I give thee the oxen also for burnt offerings, and the threshing instruments for wood, and the wheat for the meat offering; I give it all.*

And as we are told in the other narrative, as a king gives to a king, so did Araunah unto David. Probably he had been a king, and David had dispossessed him in his conquest of Jebus, but now he proves that he had a royal heart and he offers to give all to King David.

24-25. *And king David said to Ornan, Nay; but I will verily buy it for the full price: for I will not take that which is thine for the LORD, nor offer burnt offerings without cost. So David gave to Ornan for the place six hundred shekels of gold by weight.*

Not paid there and then, for he did not carry that amount with him, but fifty shekels of silver were paid that moment to bind their bargain, according to the narrative in the 2nd Book of Samuel.

26-27. *And David built there an altar unto the LORD, and offered burnt offerings and peace offerings, and called upon the LORD; and he answered him from heaven by fire upon the altar of burnt offering. And the LORD commanded the angel; and he put up his sword again into the sheath thereof.*

That God had already done in His own intent and purpose, now He does it actually, just as before Jesus Christ, our great sacrifice, was offered. God, in the eternal purpose, had stayed the sword of vengeance from His redeemed people and then actually did it when Christ their sacrifice was presented.

28-30. *At that time when David saw that the LORD had answered him in the threshingfloor of Ornan the Jebusite, then he sacrificed there. For the tabernacle of the LORD, which Moses made in the wilderness, and the altar of the burnt offering, were at that season in the high place at Gibeon. But David could not go before it to enquire of God: for he was afraid because of the sword of the angel of the LORD.*

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